



HCPH SAFETY GUIDE FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Many of us embrace worship as an essential part of life. For many faith traditions, gathering for worship is at the heart of what it means to be a community of faith.

While religious worship has a particularly profound significance to communities and individuals, as community leaders, we must keep in mind the health and safety of those we gather with. As we already know, attending large events and gatherings increases the risk of getting COVID-19, especially when gathering with people who live in different households.

The following are the minimum recommended health practices for churches, congregations, and places of worship. Churches, congregations, and places of worship may adopt additional protocols consistent with their specific needs and circumstances to help protect the health and safety of all employees, volunteers and congregants.

BASIC GUIDELINES

In alignment with federal and state guidance for reopening, we recommend a phased process for gathering and relaxing social distancing based on the current threat level of transmission. The system includes four levels of risk: 1: RED, 2: ORANGE, 3: YELLOW, and 4: GREEN. Take into consideration the county's threat level at the time of opening.

RED THREAT LEVEL 1	ORANGE THREAT LEVEL 2	YELLOW THREAT LEVEL 3	GREEN THREAT LEVEL 4
Avoid and cancel all indoor and outdoor gatherings	Avoid and cancel medium (10-250 people) and large (250+ people) gatherings indoor and outdoor	Slowly phase in indoor and outdoor gatherings	Resume large indoor and outdoor gatherings

HEALTH PROTOCOLS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- Strongly encourage at risk congregants to watch or participate in the service remotely. If this is not possible then designate an area inside the facility reserved for those at-risk, or offer a service for at-risk congregants only
- Encourage staff or congregants who are sick or who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 to stay home
- Ensure proper spacing between attendees:
 - o Keep at least two empty seats (or 6 feet separation) between parties in any row, except as follows
 - ☐ Two or more members of the same household can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or 6 feet separation) empty on either side.
 - ☐ Two individuals who are not members of the same household but who are attending together can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or 6 feet separation) empty on either side.
 - o Alternate rows between attendees (every other row left empty).

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Safety Practices:

- Encourage Staff and congregants to take the following steps to reduce the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19:
 - o Correctly and consistently wear a mask that completely covers the nose and mouth
 - o Stay at least 6 feet away from others
 - o Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol)
 - o Get vaccinated
 - o Get tested if signs or symptoms of COVID-19 appear (especially if exposed to someone with COVID-19)

HEALTH PROTOCOLS FOR EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

- o Screen employees and volunteers before coming into the church, congregation, or place of worship:
- o Send home any employee or volunteer who has any new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19
- o Do not allow employees or volunteers with new or worsening signs or symptoms to return to work until they meet criteria to discontinue home isolation
- o Do not allow an employee or volunteer with known close contact to a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure

HEALTH PROTOCOLS FOR FACILITIES

Cleaning & Disinfection

- Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available.
- Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms.
- Disinfect seats between services.
- Discontinue passing of items among attendees and disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees.
- If your church or place of worship provides meals for employees, volunteers, or attendees, it is recommended to have the meals individually packed.

Maintain rigorous sanitation practices like disinfection, handwashing, and cleanliness when preparing or serving food.

WHAT IF SOMEONE GETS SICK?

- o Designate a staff person to be the point of contact (POC) responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns.
- o Staff, clergy, volunteers, and congregants should know who this person is and how to contact them if they become sick or are around others diagnosed with COVID-19.
- o This person should also be aware of state or local regulatory agency policies related to group gatherings.

If employee, volunteer, or congregant becomes sick during service:

- o Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 during hours of operation, and ensure that any children are not left without adult supervision.
- o Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
- o Advise staff and congregants with symptoms of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.
- o Notify health officials and close contacts of those who are sick.
- o Clean and disinfect all areas used by a sick person after at least 24 hours have passed.
- o Please report any case of COVID-19 to Harris County Public Health

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- MDT_WIT_C19Reports@phs.hctx.net
 - E-fax: Email address (eFaxPHESMDTTeam@hctx.net), eFax number 832-927-0675

Please maintain communication with local public health authorities and visit <https://covid-harriscounty.hub.arcgis.com/> to determine current mitigation levels in the community.

RESOURCES:

Free COVID-19 Testing & Vaccinations

Testing

Sign up for free at <http://covidcheck.hctx.net/> or call 832-927-7575

Vaccinations

Vaccines are now for free to all adults in Texas

Schedule your appointment for free at <https://publichealth.harriscountytexas.gov/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus/Register-for-COVID-19-Vaccine> or call 832-927-8787

Additional information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine can be found at <https://publichealth.harriscountytexas.gov/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Vaccine-Information>

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html> updated 2/19/2021

<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/docs/opentx/2021/ChurchesPlacesofWorship-Attendees.pdf>
updated 3/10/2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html> updated 2/22/2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
updated 3/29/2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/screening/paper-version.pdf> updated 11/12/2020

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/toolkits/community-faith-based.html> updated 1/14/2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html> updated 4/5/2021

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